

## **Engaging Parents as Advocates and Leaders Webinar Series: A Discussion with Parent Leaders About Effective Parent-Staff Partnerships (Video 3)**

Lydia Gray-Holifield: Hello, this is Lydia ...

Melia Franklin: Welcome, everyone, to our webinar. This is a webinar, Engaging Parents as Advocates and Leaders. It's part of a series, And I am your host, Melia Franklin. I'm a consultant with the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. And I wanted to just take a moment before we dive in to go through some of the tools on our webinar platform so that you can make the most of your experience. One of the things that's great about this platform is that you can minimize, maximize, and resize, and move around all of your different resources on your control panel, you can look at the attendees, and most importantly, or two really important things are your Q&A. And then for your Q&A, we will be encouraging you to submit questions throughout the presentation, and we'll try to answer them as they come in, But we will also have a Q&A period of 15 minutes after the close of the webinar. So we invite you to stay for that. The other thing that I invite you to look at is the resources widget. There are three handouts for this webinar. The first is the PowerPoint that you can download. The second is a tip sheet, which has links to all the resources we're referencing here as well as bios of our parent leader panelists. And then you could also use chat to chat with our team if you're having issues with something. So, click the yellow question mark for tech help. So, with that, hoping you have a great time with the platform. As I said earlier, this is the third webinar in a series of webinars about Engaging Parents as Leaders and Advocates, and this is the last, actually, of the three that we're doing, and it really is important because it explores an aspect of positive family and child outcomes in the PFCE Framework. And so, this is just a tool for you to deepen your learning, and we're going to have other tools for you as we go along. In today's conversation, I'm really excited, because we have with us some amazing parent leaders from around the country who are going to be talking about their experiences interacting with staff. And so it's kind of takes you beyond, perhaps, reading about or interacting with other staff about these questions of building relationships, and the value of that, and into the parents' voices and stories themselves. And we know that Head Start and Early Head Start staff play an important role in encouraging parents as advocates and leaders for young children, and so I'm really excited to have these parent leaders share their experiences with you. So we're going to see examples of parents as powerful leaders in their communities and in early childhood program, so they themselves are living examples of that. And we're going to hear from them how cocreation, collaboration and a sense of connection with staff are really important to that journey that they've had from where they started with a young child in a program to where they are now. And throughout, we're going to be pointing to best practices to foster authentic collaboration and partnership with parent leaders. And just before we dive in, we want to do a little poll. And this is kind of just to get you started with thinking about what you're doing now in your program. And so I am ... The question of the poll is: What best practices are well-integrated in your program that encourage parents as leaders and advocates. So, I'm going to

give you just 30 seconds to complete the poll. So one of the ... One of the key things is really looking for parents' leadership abilities and sharing your observations with them. Some of you might do that on a regular basis. Encouraging them to reflect on their own cultural values. And reflecting on how, on your own cultural values. I'm going to see what some of the results are. I know not everybody, perhaps, has had a chance to respond. But definitely, many of you are looking for parents' leadership abilities and sharing your observations with them. And quite a few of you are also providing opportunities for parents to work together and build relationships with other parents. You will hear, in this presentation example, how important that is. And then maybe some places where some of you have room to grow is identifying community partnerships, where parents can expand their leadership and really advocating for the inclusion of diverse family voices at all levels of the program. So, the great thing is that we hope that you'll take away some concrete tools in working with parents to develop their leadership and advocacy skills. And, here I'm going to turn it over to our amazing panel, and they are each going to introduce themselves before we dive into our question. And so take it away, Ray.

Ray Sutcliffe II: Hi, I'm Ray Sutcliffe II, And I have kids that are 6 months, 3, 6, and 9. I've been with Head Start through all of them, and I really enjoy music. Thank you.

Jessica Turk: Hi, my name is Jessica Turk. I am from Kent County in Michigan. And I have six children, age ranges from 16 all the way up to 17. I am a parent advocate and intake coordinator for our local Children's Advocacy Center here in Kent County, and I got started in Head Start when we adopted through foster care. And I enjoy hiking and camping as a family.

Lydia Gray-Holifield: Hi, everyone. My name is Lydia Gray-Holifield, and I have two children at home. One is 11, and one is 1. And I am a parent leader in Multnomah County in Portland, Oregon, and I am a family support specialist for healthy families. And my favorite thing to do is people watching, which has been very difficult because of COVID. But yeah, that's a little bit about me.

Kathleen "RED" Holifield: Kathleen, aka RED Holifield. I have an 11-year-old and a 1-year-old. I am a parent leader in Multnomah County, and what I like to do in my spare time is just have me time, and I can use it.

Lisa Melara: Hi, my name is Lisa Melara, and I'm from East Boston, Massachusetts. I have three children ages 8, 10, and 13, all boys, living with me and my husband. I have been a parent partner since 2016 with the East Boston Social Center and the East Boston Family Engagement Network. Currently, I've been a parent partner leader for two years now. In my spare time, I volunteer a lot, especially now in the crisis that we are in the pandemic with the mutual AEC and the Boston Medical Reserve Corps, part of the Boston Public Health Commission. Thank you.

Elizabeth Szczepanek: Hi, everyone. This is Elizabeth Szczepanek. I live in Ventura County, California. I have three children ages 10, 8 and 4. I have been volunteering as a parent for Ventura First 5 Neighborhoods for Learning since 2014. And most recently, in 2009, became a parent leader of Ventura County. And all three of my children went through the Parent and

Child Together classes to First 5. And I like to go to the beach, and hiking and camping with my family.

Melia: Thanks so much, and just a reminder that you can view their bios, which have more about their leadership experiences, by going to the resource widget. These are really amazing parent leaders that have years of experience and ... Lydia and RED are also ... They're going to share a lot about their Head Start experience. Their child is not in Head Start anymore, but they have been Head Start parents in the state of Oregon and Multnomah County. So we're going to dive in with the first question. So, one of the things we hear a lot is how important it is for parents and staff to have an authentic partnership. And so, we'd like you to share some examples of what does it mean to you to have an authentic partnership with staff? And you can really share stories and specific examples, and I really look forward ... I know everyone looks forward to hearing about it. Now, who wants to start? I'm going to call on Lydia.

Lydia: I can, here ... When my daughter was in Early Head Start Home-Based Center, here in Portland, my Home-Based Family Support Specialist was an awesome individual, to whom, is still a part of our family today. And one of the things is she always made sure that she never shamed me or made me feel less than when I didn't understand something or when I really didn't want to participate in something. And she never took, "no," for an answer from me. She always saw the good and what I needed to do as far as a parent, and we had a great partnership. I think that's why she's still a part of our lives now, is because that partnership was started prenatally, and it continued all the way up until now, and I think it will go on for the rest of our lives. But having your home visitor believe in you as a parent is huge because they give you the skills and the tools to be better than what you thought you could. And so, that's what I appreciated was that our relationship that we have and that we had, it continues to grow. She never ever made me feel like I was making mistakes, even though I was. She included me in decisions that were being made about me and my child.

Melia: Thank you, Lydia. And are there any, like stories that you'd like to share that really kind of illustrate what you're talking about?

Lydia: Yes. When ... I remember one time she came to the house and she had gardening stuff ready, and she was like, "We're going to garden today, Miss Lydia." And I was like, "Yeah, we're not." And she goes, "No, we really are because Georgy really wants to garden." This is my daughter. And so I started laughing. I was like, "Yeah, I'm not putting my hands in dirt." And she was like, "You'll be fine, and you're going to enjoy it." And to this day we still garden, because that was a tradition that she started with us. And my daughter at that time was only ... Oh, man! I think she was like 9 months, 10 months. And she was ... We planted strawberries together and watching my baby and watching strawberries grow together but also watching my baby, when she picked her first strawberry off the vine and ate it, was priceless. And to this day, we still plant strawberries, and we also go to a strawberry farm, here in Portland and pick strawberries together. So, to me, that was a partnership. She knew that it was going to benefit my daughter, and so she made sure that she incorporated that in how she taught me. And so,

that's a tradition now that we have as a part of our family that came from my Head Start Family Advocate.

Melia: Thank you so much for sharing that. I'm going to invite Ray to share some of his experience.

Ray: I always loved that staff is able here in Kent County, at least, to accommodate certain things, because cause I wasn't always a big reader for the kids, and then they would tell me like, you don't even have to read the book. Just point out pictures and point out colors, and try to point it out the fact that even when they're playing, I could point out colors and turn playing into learning, and that was a big turn on for childhood learning for me.

Melia: And I remember you sharing that in working together, you began to see yourself differently in your child's life. Do you want to say a little bit more about that?

Ray: Yeah, I guess I kind of always saw educators as educators and dad is dad and mom is mom, but kind of more how we could work together and really, really turned me on to early childhood learning, and got me involved as a father, and how we go to the parent meetings and listen more, and I just felt super involved.

Melia: That's great. Any other examples? Any stories you'd like to share that could bring this to life for our audience?

Ray: I guess there was a time where my daughter was learning colors and shapes, and we were having a really hard time turning her on to the concept, and they actually cut out different shapes and different colored shapes and put them on a Velcro board, and like that kind of stuff.

Melia: So, they even gave you some tools that empowered you to be an educator at home, sounds like.

Ray: Definitely.

Melia: Fantastic. Thank you so much. Elizabeth, would you like to share?

Elizabeth: Yeah. I've been volunteering as a parent since 2012 at Ventura, and at the time, it was just for Ventura city, and we had nine different sites. And what I found really valuable was the director of the program, once I joined the parent advisory board, she asked if I wanted to go to every site to be able to see the different classes and different parents and the families that are being served in each of those classes. And so, I was able to meet those parents and really let them know that there was a parent like myself advocating for them, and to improve our programs, and to continue to make sure that we're serving all of them and their different needs, since we have so many different needs in our population. During my time, I met a lot of parents that didn't necessarily have the transportation to be able to go to different sites. And that's what's so unique about our program is that they're in the neighborhoods, that each year I had to really advocate to make sure that we stayed in those communities with the most vulnerable families that didn't have that access to transportation. So each year our leases were

up, and we have to make sure that we advocate to stay in those schools that are closest to them, that they're able to walk to. And I also advocated for, a lot of times, that older children that might have been like 3 or 4 that weren't necessarily in that parent-child class. They were able to bring them, and we had a certified person to be able to watch them while the parent was able to engage with other child. And I thought that was really valuable.

Melia: And it sounds like advocating for other parents was really rewarding and effective. Like, how important was it for you to see results of the advocacy that you did?

Elizabeth: I think it was very important. I quickly learned through going to the classes, and actually going to the advisory meeting, and meeting with the subject matter experts that they didn't necessarily meet one-on-one with those parents that were on the board. There are experts throughout the community, such as pediatricians. There was educators in our colleges. And so they really wanted to hear the parent voice. And once they knew certain needs that needed to be met, they really put those things into action, and that was the most rewarding part of being a parent leader, is really seeing that advocacy go into action. There was a lot of services that First 5 offer that a lot of parents really didn't know about, such as early developmental screening, parent classes, such as Triple P Positive Parenting. These are all offered free through the program, and a lot of parents just didn't know about it, and once they found out, it was really eye-opening for them. And a lot of them took advantage of that. And it was really wonderful to see all these parents actually accessing services that they just didn't know are available.

Melia: So, you could really see the difference you were making, and that sounds like it was very important.

Elizabeth: Absolutely.

Melia: Great. I want to invite Lisa. What does it mean to you to have an authentic partnership with parents?

Lisa: So, one of my first introduction was the Lead Boston, where they started in early literacy parent leadership training. And that was one of my first. So, what was really unique about this was that the cohorts that we had was a list of 10 parents from the 10 different neighborhoods in the city of Boston, where they trained us among ourselves with all parents, and we had a staff who trained us in the early leadership. And they trained us on how to be a leader in our community and how to teach early literacy so we were able to train other parents on this workshop-type model. And it was new, it was different, and it was the first time that that they were interested in the parent engagement, and something that they wanted to teach parents on early literacy. So, it was a different model. And they paid us for our time, as a stipend. It was over a whole spring semester. So that was my first introduction into parent leadership.

Melia: Thank you so much for sharing. RED, what is authentic partnership with staff mean to you? Are you there? Well, I'm going to ... We have a question from our audience. And by the way, I'm thrilled to share that we have 1,730 participants on the line, which is amazing. So glad

you guys took the time to listen because it really shows the respect for the parent voice. So, one person from the audience wants to know: "What activities, scenes, et cetera did you enjoy most or engaged parents during parent-center meeting or family night?" This person says, "Our program is trying to improve attendance and participation in these events. So tips, ideas on what improves this would be appreciated. Please and thank you." And so maybe we can first hear from those of you who are familiar with Head Start, and the parent-center meeting in family night, and then from others who have tips from their own experience. How about you, Ray? Do you have any tips about what did you enjoy most?

Ray: We had game nights, and I really enjoyed science night. It was even stuff like ... They would take a bottle and put baking soda and vinegar, and blow the top off for the kids, and stuff like that, like little science experiments you could do and make slime and that kind of stuff.

Melia: That sounds like hands-on was really important. And what got you in the door? What got you excited about attending?

Ray: The science, I guess, and there was, usually they had pizza. That's what got me going. I was like, "Oh, they're having pizza." [Laughter]

Melia: Yeah, pizza is usually a big draw. Lydia, do you want to share anything that you recall from your days in Early Head Start and Head Start?

Lydia: Sure, I'd love to share. We did pizza. We made pizza out of What are those little things? McMuffins. And instead of ... They didn't have to be cooked, so we use the pizza sauce, and we get fresh vegetables, which was interesting to me because when I thought of pizza, I always thought of having meat on top of it. And we didn't have to have meat. We actually had bell peppers and broccoli, and it was different but it was enjoyable. And to be able to introduce healthy eating to my baby was really good for me, because who doesn't want to eat healthy? And so, watching her, and to this day, she still likes like raw peppers, and broccoli, and things like that, not necessarily on pizza but just in general. So, that's so important to me because that established her having healthy eating habits at a young age, which has now continued.

Melia: Great. Thank you, Lydia. Jessica, do you want to share your experience?

Jessica: Yeah, I would like to share just a little bit. When I started with Head Start, our site had really low attendance at our parent meetings, so we had kind of started like a reward system, and they could earn like fake bucks, like Sylvan bucks I think is what we called them. And they can shop at our store, which was set up kind of like a pantry with household goods that they might need because the site I was at was very, very low income. So, if they came, they could earn different prizes, different products out of that store, and then we would also do different theme nights. And we would get the kids involved. Like we did an art ... We set up like an art prize, where the kids would display their artwork in the hallways, and they were just so proud. And then, we've done like carnival nights where the kids would actually run the games, and be the ones that would get the parents playing the games, so it was kind of nice to kind of switch roles with the kids and see them take ownership of something, which was always fun. And

then, we would also ... They could earn our rewards for doing things virtually, like we would host parent cafés virtually, and that was another way for them to join from home if they weren't able to get to the site.

Melia: And just out of curiosity, were these activities that parents thought of to increase the attendance in collaboration with staff? So, I think that the other thing ...

Jessica: Yeah, these were the ideas that were brought to our parent Policy Council. So those were from our representatives from each of our sites. We kind of bounce ideas off of each other, and then we'd bring it to the site supervisor. And kind of as the staff and parents would decide on what they would want to do. And they would also do polls with the parents to find out what they would like to see happen at next month's meeting. So, just to kind of get input, so we started doing surveys and polls with the parents to see what they would like.

Melia: Thank you. I really hear that engaging the parents and coming up with these activities, you're going to ... That staff are going to really benefit from their insights and their energy and obviously getting parents there by invitations to other parents. I want ... There are some questions coming in for Ray as our father representative. You talked about loving science and that was really ... and pizza. One person asked, "How do I make men feel really welcome in my classroom or activity?" And so, maybe you could talk a little bit about that.

Ray: I always felt welcomed, by being engaged. If I showed interest in something, teachers would kind of point that out, or I don't know. I know it's hard to get male involvement ... I guess it took me waking up to my son's education. I mean, it's so different for every dad, depending on what they're going through. So I mean, from my perspective, it was being engaged. I don't know about other dads.

Melia: Yeah, I hear that, and it sounds like just really knowing that you were being, that someone was looking at your interest and looking at what you're observing and building from that sounds really important, and then kind of helping you see the importance of your role. I wanted to just, before we close this section ... And the sections kind of meld together, so you're not going to miss anything. We want to ... Someone was asking about virtual engagement of families, and one of our responders was talking about virtual parent cafés. And so, I don't know who that was, but they'd like to hear a little bit more about what that looks like. So, I'm not sure who was leading about that.

Jessica: That was me, Jessica.

Melia: OK, great. Share more.

Jessica: So since the pandemic, and this wasn't, the virtual parent cafés, it wasn't necessarily something with Head Start. That was actually, it was great start, but we started going virtual, so we use the Zoom platform. And we were hosting parent cafés and having different monthly topics, and a lot of them have to deal with struggles in parenting, how to balance self-care during a pandemic, and topics like those. And with the Be Strong Families model, they have

premade question cards, based on the five protective factors, and those would be kind of based off of that. We used to do them in person. I know Head Start has a version of parent cafés modeled off of that as well. And I would ... Yeah, like I said, we started doing them virtually kind of when the pandemic started, and they've actually gotten better attendance than what we were getting in person, which is kind of nice. I think people are more comfortable talking about those hard topics when they're in the comfort of their own home, and they're not in a circle with strangers that they might not necessarily know or be comfortable talking with. So, that was just kind of some of my experience with that.

Melia: Great. Thank you. And, Lisa, I know that in Boston, you all have been doing parent engagement virtually to some extent. Do you want to talk a little bit about that programming and how you're involved?

Lisa: Yes. So, what we call it is fun Wednesdays, so we do a parent café every month. So, we have a list of every Wednesdays that we do it at 11 a.m. The first Wednesday of every month is a parent café, where we start the month off with the parenting conversations, we do a resource check. So, at the beginning of the month, resources change, if anything new, all the updates, like right now. We are in August. So, in August right now, so tomorrow will be our first parent café of the month. We will reach out, tell them where all backpack sites are. We've seen backpacks for back to school, so it's a resource check. And then, we ask the parents what do they need, what additional resources, food resources, and everything else. We call that checklist. And we check in and ask them what else do they need and what additional ... And then, the second Wednesdays we do family circle times, we do songs, games, and stories. And then the third Wednesday of the month, we do family yoga, and then all of this is done virtually. And then, the last one of the month is ... I forget what the last one is. So, we do them in four-week cycles. So we've done it in June, July, August, and then we'll continue the cycle in September. I guess, we're working to continue doing this model as long as we are virtual because we cannot get approval for in person. We have to submit to the EC if you want to do anything in person, and the paperwork alone for it is just horrendous, so we're not doing anything.

Melia: Right. And, Lisa, I know Jessica talked about how a lot of that parent ideas and parent leading. Is that true for your virtual or these things that parents activities that parents came up with and are needing?

Lisa: Yeah, this is all parent-lead, so this is run by parents.

Melia: That's so fantastic. So we're going to shift gears. And someone in the audience had such a great question that I want to kick it off, which is, "How has being a parent leader made you a more well-balanced individual as a whole? And how has it impacted your children?" And I know that earlier, we missed RED, and so I'm wondering, RED, if you want to lead off on this question. It's not part of what we rehearsed, but I think it goes to the heart, so please. RED: So, when I first started, I wasn't really involved in it, but now that I am involved, I am very ... Lydia will tell you, I go into Georgie's classroom, and she'll tell you, "You are your parent's first teacher. I want to know everything Georgie's doing. I want to know what she's supposed to be doing,



what she's not doing, and if you're not doing that, then you don't know what's going on in the classroom." If you don't go in there and advocate for your kid, you can't complain. That's how I see it. But it's made me better, all the way around as a parent, everything. She'll tell you, "I'm hard on her, because I want her to be better than what I was. Nobody advocated for me, so I'm advocating for her."

Melia: And how do you think it is? How do you think your leadership and advocacy has impacted Georgie?

RED: I don't think she ... Like I said, I'm hard on her, and I don't think she likes that. But I think that in the future, she'll thank me for it. Do you know what I'm saying?

Melia: I can testify to that. [Laughter] I can testify to that will happened. RED: It's OK. Tough love is OK. They're going to thank you later.

Melia: Lydia, do you want to share anything about your journey? How parents seeing parent leader made you more well-balanced individual as a whole? And how has it impacted your children?

Lydia: Yes, I feel like because they do provide you with the tools to be that successful parent. They do teach you how to advocate for your children, but you can walk into classrooms, and you can say, "I want to know what's going on," and you expect an answer. I also feel like because Head Start does have such an open-door policy for parents to come in and get involved and be a part of the parent Policy Council, because you are given those leadership skills from your advocate and from your teachers in your classrooms and from the family advocates that you come in contact with. You're then better prepared when your child does enter into elementary school or middle school or whatever school that they're going into. You're better equipped as a parent because you now know that you have that voice. So, that's one of the things I could say that they gave. For me, they gave me a voice. They helped me find my voice and help me advocate for my child and for myself as a parent about what's OK and what's not OK when it comes to my child. I had the pleasure of having Ron Herndon, which was the National Director for Head Start for many years, as one of my advocates and a mentor, and so because of that, I now can walk into the classroom and ask questions. Do I think sometimes it embarrasses my child? Maybe, maybe not. But I also know that she knows that I am going to advocate for her whether she's doing right or whether she's doing wrong, but I'm also got those tools and that equipment that I have now to do that from Head Start, because now I can walk in and ask the right questions and know what to look for in the classroom, what should be in the classroom, how the teacher should behave in the classroom, and also hold that teacher and my child accountable when they're not doing the right thing. So, I feel like I got all of that and that foundation from Head Start and Early Head Start.

Melia: Thank you so much for sharing. I invite the rest of you to include your thoughts on this issue, kind of your personal journey, but I'm going to ask another question. So reflecting on your leadership journey and your relationships with staff, what were the most important things that encourage you to participate and grow as a leader? For example, the attitude of the staff,

the skills or behaviors of the staff, who the staff were, and the types of experiences or opportunities that you were offered. So maybe ... Everybody wants to know about the dads. So I'm going to give you another opportunity, Ray, to share as a current Head Start parent. What are the most important like qualities and opportunities that you want to have?

Ray: I feel like once you start to take on a parent leadership role, you gain these tools, and you want to use them more. I always stay as a parent, you end up being like a therapist, and a doctor, and a hostage negotiator when you're a parent. And as you start to like apply different skills, you learn more ... I don't know. There's so much there, like the skills. I mean, for me, just seeing a dad out making a difference when I saw, I don't know if you guys know Matt Hamilton very well, but he is a WatchDOG leader. And he got me really involved as a father to try to just be better and do better. And once you get that mindset, you kind of want to keep it.

Melia: And maybe you could just share really briefly what the WatchDOG program is and just a little bit about how it helps, especially recruiting fathers?

Ray: Yeah. The WatchDOG program, it's dads of great students. And it's just to establish a male presence at the school, kind of a security thing, kind of more. Just, "Oh, you know, whoever so and so dad's here, like we all love him." And then all the kids would be like, "Dad's here!"

Melia: So, having a dad, seeing another dad engaged and having an invitation from another dad was really important for you. I hear you saying.

Ray: Yeah, and I mean, the dads would come in, some would read books, and I might draw and, like, I would help the teachers.

Melia: Yeah, that's fantastic. And this may also be something to think about for the rest of you when you're answering this question, but thinking about have you ever been able to use your advocacy in recruiting for your program, getting other families involved? Who would like to address that? You want me to call on you? How about you, Jessica?

Jessica: Yeah. Can you say that one more time?

Melia: Just have you been able to use your advocacy to recruit other parents for the program and also recruit other parents for activities?

Jessica: All the time.

Melia: All the time.

Jessica: All the time. That's pretty much I feel like from the moment ... Especially, once I became president of a parent Policy Council, I feel like that's all I did was promote and educate about what we did and who we were, and why it was important for parents to get involved. And I would do that at community events. I would go to resource fairs, and I would tell the community about Head Start and kind of take away some of the stigma, if you will. For a long time, Head Start didn't have such a great reputation in Kent County, and I don't know if it was

the same in other areas, but people always assumed that that's just where the poor kids go to preschool. And I learned very quickly that, that was not necessarily the case. That was a big stigma that I made sure people knew was inaccurate and just not the case. And I spent a lot of time, like I said, in the community, just advocating and letting them know, "Hey, you know, we need parents. We need parents to speak up. We need parents to help make changes and make sure that parents always have a voice here." And even recruiting new members every year, because I was on the Policy Council for four years. So, just letting them know like, "Hey, this is what we do. This is who we are. You can make a difference. You can change policies within your own Head Start, within your own child's school." And just really kind of embracing that. And I had a lot of parents that were excited and eager to join. I had other parents that were really hesitant. I didn't join the first time I was asked. It took two times. Because I didn't buy into it the first time around. So, it wasn't until I couldn't get services for my child that I was really like, "OK, I need to do something about this. I need to join and help make a change." So, that was kind of where my buy-in came from, so I made sure, when I was on that council, that I made sure to tell everybody and anybody that would listen to me about it.

Melia: Yeah, so it sounds like, you know, each parent has a different motivation for getting involved. But for staff person to find that motivation and find the talent, what the parent has to offer and what they need, like a good marriage of those two things sounds like a good recipe for getting parents involved. I've heard that from a few of you. So I'd love to ... RED, what qualities in Head Start staff or really any staff that you've interacted with as a parent leader, what are some of the behaviors, the skills, the attitudes that keep you coming back and help you feel like you want to lean into your leadership?

Lydia: I can answer that question. This is Lydia.

Melia: OK.

Lydia: What I think that has helped me or made a difference for me is that ... Parents have been inviting in the classroom or parents, their voice matters when they ask a question and the teacher, or the family advocate, or the support specialist do everything in their power to answer the question. And if they don't have the answer, they'll tell you that they'll get back to you. But having my voice matters and how I feel matter means everything in the world to me, because I'm asking a question because I really don't understand. And so being able to have a safe space to ask those questions, have a safe space to walk into the classroom and be greeted when you walk in, "Good morning. How are you doing?" And greeted by your name and greet your child by their name. To me, that's the most impactful thing as a parent because that means that you've taken the opportunity to get to know who I am. And also for me, the one thing I loved about Head Start is that the teacher came to your home to get to know you in your home. So, it wasn't just about you being in the classroom. It was also them come into your home and the initial beginning of the school year, every year to your home to visit with you and your child for a while and to get to know your child after pictures, and be inclusive of you being in that classroom. And that's what's important for me as a parent.

Melia: Thanks so much for sharing. Boy, this hour is going by so fast. And I know that there are probably panelists that have answers to questions that have already come up. And as we wrap-up, kind of ... I just encourage you to take a couple minutes or a minute to sum up ... If you were in charge of engaging parents as advocates and leaders, what would you want every parent to walk in the door to experience? And I will start with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: I just think it's really important that agencies and staff really understand that parents have a unique perspective in this, and they acknowledge that, and recognize it, and value it. It's so vital that parents time and experience be honored and respected. And they are they're taking their time away from their families a lot of times, when they are helping out in these parent meetings, and just really valuing their time, paying them for their time, and supporting their ideas and helping it, bring it to life.

Melia: Thanks so much. Who would like to go next?

Lisa: I can go next.

Ray: Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

Lisa: So, this is Lisa. I mean, one of the things that I've always said was keeping open and honest and transparent with parents. I mean, we all know what the word transparent is, but I think that a lot of times agency says one thing and they do another. And I think just opening the line of communication and really meeting parents where they're at. And really valuing their opinions and trusting parents. They really know their child. And just giving them the benefit of the doubt, what things are and just asking parents about what is really going on with their family and the situation. Because I think sometimes, they make assumptions, and they don't have that open dialogue in that conversation with parents about what's going on, and they file report sometimes and different things like that, so I think just really keeping the conversation going.

Melia: Thanks, Lisa. How about you, Ray?

Ray: Yeah, I've always appreciated, like flexibility, and the fact that there's not a uniform solution to every problem. And I've always felt like staff took the time to appreciate what I was saying or appreciate the problem at hand rather than just, "Here, fill out this form." [Laughter]

Melia: Who would like to go next? How about Jessica?

Jessica: OK, I pretty much ... Oh, are you there?

Melia: Yeah, go ahead.

Jessica: OK. I am going to pretty much echo Lisa. So, I think she covered pretty much anything I was going to say.

Melia: That's great. You guys are on the same page.

Jessica: Yeah.

Melia: How about how about you, RED? What would you want every parent who walks into an Early Learning Program to experience to help them feel like they can be a leader? RED: I want them to experience first of all being respected, having their voice heard, knowing that it's OK to ask questions and not be judged for it.

Melia: What, in your experience ... It sounds like that both the relationship and the trust is built first. And then, it's built over time. So, I've heard a lot of examples of that. And curious, if Head Start ... Do you feel like Head Start is really embracing the diversity of the many families that come in, and was that really helpful for you?

RED: Yeah, it was.

Ray: What'd you say?

Melia: Lydia, do you want to add to that?

Lydia: Yes, I can. So in case no one has caught on, RED and I are married, and we are a same-sex married couple, and so, when our daughter was in Head Start, we went to pick her up, and the teacher was like pulled up to the side, and she thought that they were going to have a situation that day because, well, my wife would walk into the classroom, Georgie has always called my wife daddy. And so, when she would walk in, she walked in one day to pick up Georgie and Georgie was screaming, "There comes my daddy," and so she's all excited. So, the next day, when she got to school, one of the little boys told her, "Daddy are for boys," and she said, "Not my daddy." "My daddy's a girl, and it's OK, and you're going to be fine." And the teacher was really proud of Georgie because she was able to stand her own ground and say what she needed to say. And as a same-sex couple, we were never ever treated any different than anyone else in the classroom. We were given the same opportunities and the same privileges to be who we are as parents, never judged. Our daughter was never judged. She was never made to feel less than because he had two women for parents. And to hear the teacher be proud of Georgie, and that was the thing that she said, "I'm very proud of." She called her, Georgie girl. She said, "I'm very proud of Georgie girl, because she stood her own." She said, "I thought I was going to have to intervene, but she stood her own. She let them know how she felt." And they continued to play. And it was never brought up again, the kids never teased her, and to this day, she is able to have that same aspect when she walks into a classroom, and people see us as a same-sex couple, and she calls her daddy, and so no one has ever made her feel like she was less of a parent. And so, for my wife and myself, that was very important for us, that she was included and inclusive of being a child in the classroom, that she was never made to feel different, and neither were we.

Melia: It's such a powerful story because it really is also leadership development for your daughter. She is encouraged to use her leadership in that situation. I just want to thank the panelists for their sharing so openly their stories. I hope that they gave you a lot to reflect on. What we're going to do now is we're going to offer you, the audience, another opportunity to

reflect on what you're taking away in another poll. And then, we're going to close this part of the webinar, and we're going to stay on for more Q&A. And so, that's where we are headed, but I just want to thank ... I feel so proud to have witnessed your stories, and I just feel like this is a priceless moment to hear from you directly. So, stick around if you want to hear more Q&A. And let's start the poll. So this is really like what are you taking away? What would you like to either prioritize or start to implement over the next 90 days? This is kind of your opportunity to think about actions you want to take. And maybe they don't look exactly like what these answers are, but these are some of the things that were brought up in one way or another. I'm just really excited about: What you're going to take away? What are you going to put in place? What sparked your interest? Or, what's something new you learned that you'd like to act on? I'm just going to give you a couple more minutes before we close the... Couple more seconds before we close the poll. Hopefully, most of you have gotten a chance to participate. And so, one of the things that sounds like, you really like to increase is to provide or plan more opportunities for parents to work together and build relationships. You've heard great stories about parent-led activities. And another piece that a lot of you seem to be drawn to is identifying opportunities for parents to expand their leadership, working in partnership with community organizations. We heard from Jessica that there's another collaborative, great start collaborative, where she has been able to share her talents as a leader, and I believe Ray as well. They're both from Kent County, Michigan. And another piece, about 20% of you are going to work more on looking for parents' leadership abilities and sharing your observations. We've heard that from a lot of the parents of how important it was to hear about how they were already a leader and to have those one-on-one conversation. So, few more points before we transition to the Q&A. First, again, I want to really, really thank our amazing parent leaders. I could of ... I know that we could have talked for another hour, and there would be no end to the insights we could share, and I wish we had more time, but you all did an amazing job, so thank you. I also want to pull your attention to some resources. So, Head Start just has amazing resources. These are a few of the publications, those resources for parents and resources for staff, that we want to draw your attention to, and all of them are linked on the tip sheet, which is in your resources widget, down at the bottom of your screen. So, these are things you can check out if you haven't seen them already or maybe you can see them in light of what you have heard today. We also want to invite you to check out the MyPeers space. This is a way for you to deepen your practice, and there's actually a community, that this MyPeers is about different communities. They're actually is a Fatherhood Community, that is led by a father engagement person in Kent County, who Ray has met [Inaudible]. But they're ... In particular, I want to guide you to a deepening practice ... Sorry, deepening practice community. And this slide shares how do you become member of MyPeers and how you can then search for different communities of your interest. And many of these are very active. And you can ask questions, just like you did in this webinar. So, there's many ways that Head Start is providing you with opportunities to grow, and conversation doesn't stop here. Another thing I want to bring to your attention is another tool, Text4FamilyServices, and this can help you take your family engagement practice to the next level. It's really easy to sign up for. It's a free text messaging service, and it's designed for people such as yourselves, family service providers, and it's also available in Spanish. So there's a really simple way to join. You just text the letters PFCE to 22660, and you're signed up. So, we hope that you take advantage of that. And again, we just

want to say thank you. Right now we're going to transition to the Q&A part, and I hope you stay with us. Thank you. So, let's dig back in to some of these questions. I think that ... Let me see. Whoo! Lots of questions. So one question is kind of a follow-up on one of the questions you asked in the last part. What would you want a new Head Start staff to know? Let's say you are in charge of preparing this new staff person to come into Head Start, and they didn't have the knowledge that you have. What would you tell them? And I will just let you all speak, popcorn style. What would you want a new staff member to know, and especially someone that's never worked in the field?

Jessica: This is Jessica. I think for a first-time staff member, that's new in the field, I think the biggest thing would be have patience. I mean, for the most part, most of these parents are new to school too. A lot of them, it might be their first child coming into school. They don't know what to expect. It's all-new for everybody, so to have patience with those parents and be fluid, and just kind of go with the flow a little bit, and try to work well with them. And, yeah, patience. [Laughter]

Melia: Patience. Yeah. Patience and, I guess, listening and learning from the parents. And maybe this will be relevant, especially to you Ray, but might also be to others ... Here's a question about home visiting. What did you learn from your home visitor ... I lost that. Sorry. Oh, what did you want or need from your home visitor to help build your parent engagement with activities at all levels from the home-base or child care model? Actually, Lydia and RED, you might be able to answer this question as well. How did the home visiting help with your engagement?

Ray: I really liked that they stayed on topic, like if I had a specific issue, like the letter A, like first day then they would bring everything that revolves around letter A, like I don't know. There's so many examples that I can't think of a specific one, but I really like the topic, like if there's a certain issue or a certain something that you're working on to kind of stay on topic, I guess.

Melia: Thank you. Anything you'd like to add from your experience, Lydia and RED, with home visiting? RED: Do you want me to answer?

Melia: Go ahead. RED: With home visiting, I think it's important because the home visitor is getting to know you in your environment. And kids act different in their home versus in the classroom. So, when they're actually taking time out to come to your home. They want to see how your kids and how you interact in that environment, so I think that's important. And I think it's a great tool that other people and other organizations should do. Because there's a lot of organizations that don't do that.

Melia: Yes, it's very special that Head Start has the Early Head Start as well. Yeah.

Lydia: So for me ...

Melia: Oh, go ahead, Lydia.

Lydia: I'm sorry. So for me having the home visitor coming to our home and be respectful of our home. But also when we got together, because we get together once a month at a center location with the other parents that were also doing home based. So, that was important because we got the ... Even though we were only having one-on-ones with our home visitor every week, once a month, we also got an opportunity to meet with the other parents that were also having one-on-one home visiting. So, that helps the parent and family engagement with other parents in the community.

Melia: Thank you. So, I know a lot of parents are trying to figure out what this school year is going to be like, whether your kids are ... whatever level your kids are in school, because in many areas, schools at least can start virtually. How do you think parents, and how are you feeling and how do you think parents in your community are feeling about engaging predominantly virtually in this upcoming school year? And what do you think it works best as far as the type of methods? Ray, are your kids going to the center or you're going to be... Is it going to be virtual at the Head Start?

Ray: It's going to be a mix but mainly at the center, but I'm super nervous and no one, like even the government's not even sure what to do about this thing.

Melia: Yeah, that's very nerve-wracking.

Jessica: This is Jessica. Can I say something? OK. I'm super ... I am for sending my kids to school, and I have mixed emotions about it. Our schools actually gave us the option to do all virtual or all in person. And I chose to do all in person, because I have children with special needs that has interventions at school, that they won't get at home, and that they won't get virtually. So that's my concern is children with IEPs and 504 plans aren't getting the same one-on-one care or special accommodations that they would otherwise get with in person learning, and doing that virtually is very difficult. We really struggled at the end of last school year to the point where we just ... I hate to say it, but with my youngest, I pretty much gave up. And when you're working with children that young, socialization is so important that's impossible to do virtually. It's just ... It's not the same. We're definitely ... It's going to be a struggle no matter what platform schools decide to use, but yeah, for me, I'm all about the in person, just for those, the socialization, and the special needs.

Melia: Yeah, I hear that. In terms of what parents need, what kind of support or what kind of ... Like how engagement might look different or have a different ... in terms of topics, have different emphasis. What are your thoughts? Anyone about what you would like to see, either your early learning or Head Start, do to support parents in their engagement and using their voice in a virtual way?

Ray: Oh, sorry. I was going to say I think it's difficult because educators are professional educators or full-time educators, and I don't feel like a lot of parents ... We're parents. We're trying to do social-emotional stuff and not just straight education. And I feel like it puts a lot on the parents, and it's got to be frustrating for the teachers because it's harder for them to do their jobs virtually.



Melia: Right, right. So parents need support for balancing those roles. Lydia, are you going to share something?

Lydia: Oh, that was RED.

Melia: It was RED, sorry. Go for it. Sorry. RED: Yeah, it's me. I actually ... I'm kind of 50-50 with it. Well, I don't think we want to send Georgie to a classroom just for health and safety reasons, but I think this is a good opportunity and a good time to get parents involved that are not normally involved in your kid's learning. It's almost like they're being forced to be involved now. You know what I'm saying? So, I think this is a good thing.

Melia: Yeah. And what do you think could support that and make them feel more empowered to take on those roles effectively? RED: Well, I can speak for me, and Lydia, and Georgie, but there was a few times, like when it first started, I think Georgie ... I think they use like Google Classroom or something. But they have a system that parents who are not tech-savvy can understand, I think that will help a lot of people because that by itself will make you give up. So if they made it easy for them, they wouldn't want to give up so easy. But yeah, they have to be forced to actually get involved in their kid's learning now.

Melia: That's right. And I wonder if like Jessica, and Lisa, and Elizabeth, you might have some thoughts on how does family advocacy work virtually? How can families advocate, have a voice?

Lydia: Can I answer that question? This is Lydia.

Melia: Oh, yeah, of course.

Lydia: So, I would say that for a school system to have a class that's just for the parents, in the beginning, so that parents can learn and understand that this is what we're going to be doing this school year. Here in Portland, where I'm in Multnomah County, they make sure all the kids had Chromebook that didn't have access to a computer, but you can give the child a Chromebook. But if you're not making sure they have Internet access, that kind of defeats the purpose. Georgie's school that she just left from was a little different, so the teachers taught in front of the classroom. They didn't just give them a packet. The teachers actually were meeting with them every day. They got up every day, like as if they were still going to school. And so, I think that's the other thing is for parents to understand, a little bit better, is for them to have a special class a couple of days before school starts, where they're teaching the parents and giving the parents a drill on how to help their children in the virtual world. But also coming up with maybe pods in your community, where other parents who have to go back to work, they can trust another family to leave their child at that person's house, and they know that parent is already equipped with the right tools to be able to teach their child or help their child log on to the computer and different things like that for coming up with community pods. And things like that, I think will help a lot of parents when it comes to this virtual learning that we're going to have to get used to and have to participate in. And I also agree with RED. It does make

parents step out of their comfort zone to now have to figure out how to help their kids learn. And so it also kind of shows us what the teachers have to deal with every day.

Melia: That's right. That's right. And well, we have just a minute left, and I want to invite folks who we haven't heard from in a little bit. Lisa and Elizabeth, do you have some quick last comments that you'd like to share?

Lisa: My biggest problem with all this virtual learning is that we have three children at home. Two of them does have IEP. And like they ... I have one who attended the extended school year and two who attended December program. And I knew we have one peep from the school system, which is very disappointing, right? My kids were on Zoom every single day, Monday through Friday from 9 to 12, and one from 8 to 11, And another one from like 10 to 12. Not once did they engage me, as a parent, and check in with me to see how my child was doing. A few times, I poked my head through on the Zoom and said hello to teacher. But there was no space for parents. It was always child-focused, right? It just felt like, "OK, we have your child on Zoom because we have to have your child on Zoom, but we're not going to check in with you. And we'll send you a couple emails here and there and let you know that we have your child." And that was as much parent engagement as I got. And, "Oh, we need a consent form here and there." And that was about it. And the conversation needs to be changed. And, oh, but there's committee meetings to ask about what we want about your opinion of the call. But, we could send a comment. But on live meetings, there's ... You could raise our hand, but you might not even get picked. So it's very disappointing. "But our argument is, well, unfortunately, there's 54,000 students in the school district." So that's their excuse. And then, the model that we have is that so we don't know yet, but it's only August, and we're going to delay the opening of schools and we might do virtual. We might not. You know what I mean? And parents are frustrated.

Lisa: You know what I mean, so ...

Melia: Yeah. Yeah.

Lisa: It's really frustrating at the...

Melia: Yeah. I'm sure you speak for many parents. And I really, again, just want to thank all of you again for your participation. It's been fantastic hearing from you, and I know that the 1,700 people who are listening, got a lot out of it. And so at this moment, we're going to close the webinar. And we will try, if there are questions we can get to, we'll try to answer them, after the fact, but we just want to thank you again. And have a wonderful rest of the week.